



**WHAT HAPPENS IN CRIMEA WILL
DETERMINE TAIWAN'S FATE**

BY DAVID KIRICHENKO

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The 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea had far-reaching implications for global politics. They demonstrated that it is still possible for countries to get away with redrawing borders through aggression. Though the international community condemned the annexation, imposing economic [sanctions](#) on Russia, such sanctions did not restore Crimea to Ukraine, nor deter Russia from invading again in 2022.

The People's Republic of China has long considered resolving "the Taiwan question" crucial. China's leader Xi Jinping has stated that the absorption of Taiwan, even if it requires [force](#), is key to his [plan](#) to "rejuvenate the Chinese nation." China's leaders closely [watch](#) the situation in [Ukraine](#), seeing it as a test of American determination and the unity of Western alliances. China also sees the potential for a prolonged conflict in Europe as a [distraction](#) for the West. As Russia's war in Ukraine continues, it consumes American resources and attention.

If Russia ultimately maintains control over newly annexed Ukrainian territory, it could embolden China's ambitions to annex Taiwan by force. The threat of [sanctions](#) may not be enough to deter Beijing: Policymakers in China may also anticipate that the economic dependence of other countries on China could mitigate the severity of these consequences and some Chinese officials believe they can [evade](#) US-led sanctions.

It is therefore crucial that Ukraine's supporters in the West send a decisive message, and send it now.

Red lines

Before the 2022 invasion there was little faith that [Crimea](#) could be restored to Ukraine, and that possibility remains an open question in the ongoing conflict. Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#) previously stated that a Ukrainian effort to retake Crimea would be a red line for Putin, but there has been a shift in his [stance](#), as he asserts that there will be no "just" or "durable" peace unless Ukraine's territorial integrity is restored.

A Biden administration official even told members of Congress in December 2022 that Ukraine has the military capability to take back [Crimea](#). According to retired Lt. Gen. [Ben Hodges](#) of the US Army, there is growing belief that Ukraine's military will successfully regain control of Crimea by August 2023. The United Kingdom has recently supplied Ukraine with multiple "[Storm Shadow](#)" cruise missiles, significantly bolstering the nation's long-range strike capabilities.

Furthermore, French President Emmanuel Macron has [committed](#) to providing Kyiv with the SCALP-EG missile, similar to the Storm Shadow, with a range of up to 155 miles. This advanced weaponry holds the potential to target strategic locations, including the [Kerch Strait Bridge](#)—a crucial land link between Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, serving as a vital supply route for Russian forces amid the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Despite apprehensions from certain Western leaders regarding Putin's designation of Crimea as a "[red line](#)," the region remains under relentless assault from Ukrainian forces. The recent introduction of advanced, extended-range munitions from the United States is poised to further escalate the barrage on military targets. As Russia hurriedly constructs defensive [trenches](#) in Crimea, it becomes evident that it is profoundly worried about the region's susceptibility to a potential Ukrainian invasion.

Last September, Putin declared Kherson part of Russia, despite lacking full control. Putin declared that [Russia](#) would use “all the forces and means at their disposal” to “protect” this newly acquired territory. However, Ukraine showed little concern and, within 40 days, Russia abandoned Kherson's capital city. Putin's annexation justification was based on a staged poll, claiming it represented the will of the people much like the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

In a recent statement, former French President [François Hollande](#) highlighted the notion that a triumphant Ukraine, symbolized by the withdrawal of Russian forces from Donbas and potentially even Crimea, would effectively discourage Russia and China from pursuing imperialistic ambitions against their neighbors. The defeat of Putin would not only signify the abandonment of such temptations but also serve as a resolute message that aggressive actions will not yield favorable outcomes.

However, if Ukraine falls short of reclaiming its original borders from 2014 and can only restore its pre-February 2022 borders, China may interpret it as the West's insufficient commitment to reestablishing the international order. In fact, the recently appointed special [envoy](#) of China for the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has emphasized an immediate cease-fire. This proposal entails granting Russia control over the currently occupied regions of Ukraine. Such an outcome would embolden Russia further. Consequently, a Russian triumph would deliver a disheartening message to the world and set an alarming precedent for Beijing, offering them encouragement in their own ambitions.

The provision of essential weaponry to Ukraine in a timely manner, enabling the restoration of its internationally recognized borders, holds significant importance for both the United States and Europe. Failure to expedite this support inadvertently benefits China by diverting attention and resources away from Taiwan. In the event of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, the United States would be compelled to prioritize the defense of Taiwan due to its heightened strategic value. Hence, it becomes crucial for the United States to motivate its European allies to assume a more prominent role in protecting against Russian

aggression. Encouragingly, recent developments indicate a positive trend, exemplified by Germany's recent announcement of its largest aid [package](#) to Ukraine yet—nearly \$3 billion.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has [stated](#), “This Russian war against Ukraine and against the entire free Europe began with Crimea and must end with Crimea—with its liberation.” But the importance of the war ending in Crimea is for more than just Europe. It will serve as a cautionary tale for future acts of aggression that, in the long term, the democratic world will band together no matter how long it takes to defeat authoritarian aggression. A quicker end to the war with a complete restoration of international order, serves as the best deterrent to China's Taiwan ambitions.

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